



PERSONAL NAMES, IRANIAN IV. PARTHIAN PERIOD

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For the Parthian period there is no super-abundance of primary sources written in the official (Middle) Parthian administrative language. Such as do exist, however, are far more relevant to the anthroponymy of that time than the other sources for this language, which are of a Sasanian or even post-Sasanian date, namely, the Parthian versions of the Sasanian royal inscriptions and the Manichean Turfan texts. The primary source material in the Parthian language is without exception epigraphic: the coins issued by the Arsacid kings (their Greek legends being replaced by Parthian ones from the 1st century CE; see Alam, 1986, pp. 121 ff.) and a great number of (mostly very short) inscriptions from the reign of king Mithridates I (the captions of the rock-relief at Kōng-e Nowruzi) to the end of the Parthian empire. Most numerous are ostraca, among them more than 2,750 pieces from Nisā (from the 1st century BCE), which contain hundreds of personal names; in continuation of earlier studies by Gignoux (1972, pp. 45–68) and MacKenzie (1986), these have been systematically analyzed for the first time by Schmitt (1998; but cf. also Schmitt, 1999, because the edition of the texts was completed only afterwards). Moreover several other rock-, stone-, and vase-inscriptions are to be mentioned and likewise the three Greek and Parthian [Avromān](#)



documents (for the Iranian names in the Greek texts, see Mayrhofer, 1974).

In close, direct connection with Parthian onomastics, however, are the many Iranian names attested in Armenian (see *EIr.* II, pp. 456-59), the bulk of which has been appropriated in Parthian times. The historical background to this influence is the fact that Armenia was politically dependent on the Parthian empire for centuries and was ruled by a collateral branch of the Arsacid dynasty, which brought Iranian civilization and customs to Armenia (see [ARMENIA AND IRAN](#)). Such close contact between Armenians and Parthians during this period is reflected most clearly in those names that were adopted by Armenians and were bestowed even on ethnic Armenians (for a complete treatment of these names see Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, pp. 17–91; for a first typological analysis cf. Schmitt, 1984, but in general also Schmitt, 1996).

Seemingly both the Arsacids who ruled over Armenia from 53 (or 66) CE and the Parthian noblemen who came with them carried on using their inherited Parthian names such as *Aršak*, *Trdat*, *Xosrov*, *Varazdowxt*, and the like. Afterwards the Armenian aristocracy and perhaps also sections of the common people (though about this we have only scanty information) imitated this custom and became accustomed to using Parthian names, continuing to do so even after becoming Christians. In this way all the various types of Parthian names, including formations which arose only in Middle Iranian times, found their way into Armenia (cf. Schmitt, 1984). Those Parthian anthroponyms that became customary in Armenia even for Armenians by birth are, therefore, in the literal sense of the word, collateral evidence of Parthian personal names and of the onomastic situation in the Arsacid empire. To these must be added also the names of historical persons of the Parthian empire and of contemporary Armenia (of royalty, officials, military commanders, etc.) as attested in the Armenian sources from the 5th century CE onwards. All these names are taken into account in what follows.

It will emerge that the Parthian personal names are deeply rooted in the (inherited) Iranian anthroponomastic system, as can clearly be seen in their relations to other Iranian onomastic traditions of previous periods (cf. Schmitt, 1998, pp. 177 f.). In spite of the great changes from Old to Middle Iranian (and in particular Western Middle Iranian) in the phonological history, which obscure in many respects the original forms and make their analysis more difficult, the diversity of the anthroponyms and of their many different inherited types (see section i., above) is still plainly recognizable in the



Parthian period. Those original types of anthroponyms may be illustrated by the following examples taken from both the Nisā ostraca (with the serial numbers from Schmitt, 1998) and the Armenian tradition (and occasionally from the Greek Avrōmān documents):

A.i. (single-stem full names): *prḥt(k)Fra-hāt(ak)* (no. A.3), Gk. *Phraátēs* from OIr. **Frahāta-* “Gained, Earned”; *prnhw Farnaxw* (no. A.4; with *prnhwntkFarnxwandak*) from OIr. **Farnah-vant-* “Being full of splendor”; Arm. *Varaz* from OIr. **Varāza-* “Mr. Boar”;

A.ii. (two-stem full names):

A.ii.1 (possessive compounds): *’rtpn Artā-pān* (no. B.1) from OIr. **Ṛta-pāna-* “With the protection of Truth”; *hwmy(k) Hu-māy(ak)* (no. B.5), Arm. *Hmayeak* from OIr. **Hu-māya- (ka-)* “Gifted with good faculties”; *mtrprnMihr-farn* (no. B.7) from OIr. **Miθra-farnah-* (attested in Gk. *Mitraphérnēs*) “With Mithra’s splendor”; *whwmny Wah-man* (no. B.12) from OIr. **Vahu-manah-* “Turning his mind to the good”; Arm. *Aršam* = OPers. *Ṛšāma-* “Possessing the strength of heroes”; Arm. *Xosrov* from OIr. **Hu-sravah-* (cf. Av. *Hao-srauuah-*) “Possessing good reputation”; Arm. *Vštasp* = OPers. *Vištāspa-* “With horses untied (for racing)”;

A.ii.2 (determinative compounds): *’trwdt Ātar-dāt* (no. C.5) = Av. *Ātərə-dāta-* “Given by the Fire-god (as the genius of the 9th day)”; *bgdtBag-dāt* (no. C.6), Arm. *Bag(a)rat* from OIr. **Baga-dāta-* (as required by El. *Ba-ka-da-(ud/ad-)da*, Aram. *bgdt*, etc.) “Given by the gods”; *kwp(y)ztKōf-zāt* (no. C.11), Gk. *Kōphasátēs* from OIr. **Kaufa-zāta-* “Born in the mountains”; *mtrdtMihr-dāt* (no. C.13), Arm. *Mihrdat*, Gk. *Meiridátēs*, *Miradátēs* (both in Avrōmān) from OIr. **Miθra-dāta-* (Gk. *Mithradátes*, etc.) “Given by Mithra”; *spndt(k) Spand-dāt(ak)* (no. C.19), Arm. *Spandarāt* = Av. *Spəntō-δāta-* “Given by redeeming [Ārmaiti] (as the genius of the 5th day)”; Gk. *Mira-bandákēs* (Avrōmān) from Parth. **Mihr-bandak* (= Arm. *Mihrewandak*) “Mithra’s servant”;

A.ii.3 (governing compounds): *’rybrzn Arya-barzan* (no. D.1) from OIr. **Arya-brz-ana-* (as attested in Gk. *Ariobarzánēs*) “Making the Iranians great”; *mtrbwzn Mihr-bōžan* (no. D.5) from OIr. **Miθra-bauḡ-ana-* (reflected in Gk. *Mithrobouzánēs*) “Delighting Mithra”; *prdrmn Frāda-ramn* (no. D.11) from OIr. **Frāda-ramna-* “Furthering peace”; *wyndprn(k) Winda-farn(ak)* (no. D.12) = OPers. *Vinda-farnah-* “Being blessed with splendor”; Arm. *Dareh* = OPers. *Dārāya-vauš* “Holding firm the good”;



A.ii.4 (inverted forms): *bḥtssn Baxt-Sāsān* (no. H.12) perhaps formed by inversion of *ssnbḥt Sāsān-baxt* (no. C.21) “Allotted by Sāsān”;

B.i.1 (single-stem short names): *bwzn(y) Bōžan* (no. E.1) from OIr. **Bauj-ana-*, shortened from the many compound names like *Mihr-bōžan* (see A.ii.3 above); *mtr(y) Mihr* (no. E.4) from OIr. **Miθra-*, based on the compounds with this theonym; *prwrt(y) Fravart* (no. E.6) = OPers. *Fravarti-*; *wtrgrn(k) Varhragh(ak)* (no. E.13), Arm. *Vahagn, Vahan*, based on the theonym OIr. **Værθragha-*;

B.ii.1 (single-stem hypocoristics): *ʾršk Aršak* (no. F.2), Arm. *Aršak*, Gk. *Arsákēs* (Avrōmān) = OPers. *Ṛša-ka-*; *bwḥtk Buxt-ak* (no. F.4) based on compounds in OIr. **-buxta-* “saved by”; *mtrk Mihr-ak* (no. F.5), *mtryn(y) Mihr-ēn* (no. F.8) based on names containing OIr. **Miθra-*; *tryn(k) Āhr-in(ak)* (no. F.25) from OIr. **Āθr-ina-*, the counterpart of OPers. *Āç-ina-*; *kryn Kār-in* (no. F.30), Arm. *Karin* from OIr. **Kār-ina-*, based on OPers. *kāra-* “army, people”; Arm. *Aršēn*, in the end from OIr. **Ṛš-aina-* based on **Ṛšan-* “male, man, hero”; Arm. *Vrkēn*, like MPers. *Gurg-ēn* based on OIr. **Værk-aina-* and **værka-* “wolf”;

B.ii.2 (two-stem hypocoristics): Arm. *Artašir*, to be analyzed as OIr. **Ṛta-xš-ira-* (with the hypocoristic suffix **-ira-*), shortened from OIr. **Ṛta-xšaθra-* = OPers. *Ṛta-xšaça-* (cf. Schmitt, 1979, pp. 68 ff.).

The sizeable anthroponomastic evidence from Nisā has deepened our knowledge of Parthian personal names so much that also the differences with the Old Iranian period have become increasingly clear. Even if the inherited onomastic types of Indo-Iranian origin are still plainly evident in Parthian, new types and innovating forms of personal names have developed, which increasingly conceal the old heritage. If compared with the Old Iranian situation (as attested in Avestan or in the sources of the Achaemenid period), the personal names of Parthian times have changed through replacement of the component lexemes, and also as a result of the influence of modernizing trends on the development of the entire onomastic system.

Apart from the types of names inherited from Old Iranian, there are several other categories of names in Parthian (and Middle Persian) that are quite characteristic for these Western Middle Iranian languages. One of these innovations comprises three-stem formations based on secondary joining of previously existing names; likewise it would have been entirely out of place in Old Iranian times for a hypocoristic suffix to be added to a two-stem form not shortened already, as we find, e.g., in Parth. *hwspyn(k) Huwaspy-in(ak)*, which



obviously is a derivation in *-in* from OIr. **Huv-aspa-* “With good horses.” Still more striking is a type of new formations which may be described as ‘theophoric dummy dvandvas’ and which must be the result of secondary juxtaposition of two divine names: Parth. *’trwmtr(k) Ātar-Mihr(ak)* (as MPers. *’twr(y)mtr(y) Ādur-Mihr*), *mtrssn(k)Mihr-Sāsān(ak)*, *ršnwmtr Rašn-Mihr*, *wtrgrnssn Warhagn-Sāsān*, etc., but also Arm. *Atr-ormizd*, *Mihr-nerseh*, *Mihr-všnasp*, *P’ar-nerseh* and the like. Whether these formations are simply mechanically invented out of elements common in personal names, or else take up the two divine names intentionally, is an open question. However, names that originally had the function of patronymics (or “propatronymics”) but, owing to a loss of their original meaning, have become ordinary idionyms (as, e.g., Av. *Friiāna-* or OIr. **Tigrāna-*), are attested already in Old Iranian (see section ii., above).

Women’s names. In the Indo-European anthroponomastic system the women’s names were formed by a mere change of the masculine form into feminine (chiefly of *a*-stems into those in *-ā-* or *-ī-*). In consequence of the Middle Iranian phonological developments, such a differentiation between the genders is hardly possible any more. Relics of such formations can be seen anyhow in Arm. *Anoyš* (lit. “Charming one”) or *Ašxên* (lit. “Ms. Turquoise”), whereas the Avrōmān-Greek form *Azátē* (= Parth. *’z’t āzāt* “noble”) is of course another matter. Overall, certain types of new formations that do allow a reliable characterisation of the feminine gender have become productive. In particular the type of determinative compound with *dux* “daughter” as their second element is an unambiguous strategy of this kind. The type corresponds to Middle Persian names such as *Narseh-dux*, *Ohrmazd-dux*, *Pērōz-dux*, *Varāz-dux* “Daughter of Narseh,” etc.; for Parthian it is attested only indirectly by Armenian references to *Xosrovi-dowxt* “Daughter of Xosrov [i.e., Xosrov I, king of Armenia],” *Varaz-dowxt*, and others. Since there are cases, however, where other than the name of her actual father is contained in the first part of the woman’s name, one must be on guard against taking *dux* literally.



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